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Turner's book is candid, in spite of the CIA

SECRECY AND DEMOCRACY: The CIA in Transition

By Stansfield Turner
Houghton Mifflin
304 pages, \$16.95

Reviewed by
Frank Davies

A CIA man is forced to resign, taking with him many important secrets. He doesn't like what he sees happening to the agency. He writes a book. The CIA edits and censors it, and even threatens to take him to court.

The author is outraged, but after negotiations with the highest levels of government, he reluctantly agrees with most of the changes. He blasts the CIA leadership for "extreme arbitrariness" and "ridiculous" deletions. The book, aptly titled *Secrecy and Democracy*, is released. The war of words continues.

But there's a real twist to this familiar plot, a touch of Graham Greene irony. The author is no disgruntled former agent but the former director of the agency, Stansfield Turner — the Navy admiral who brought a reformer's zeal for better management, closer supervision of operations and high-tech improvements to the agency in 1977 as Jimmy Carter's appointee.

And some of Turner's own procedures as director were turned against Turner the author. His memoirs were picked apart by his successors in the Reagan-managed CIA, vocal critics of Turner's tenure who used agency rules Turner had defended to force about 100 deletions from his book.

This right-to-publish battle had its comic aspects. The administration's broad definition of national security meant that Turner couldn't use the term "M16" (the British intelligence organization) or excerpts from other memoirs, including Carter's. CIA censors did not explain how such public information was going to aid our enemies.

Maybe the Reagan CIA had a more devious goal — to keep Turner's book off the bestseller

lists by cutting the juicy stuff. Even the best anecdotes are thoroughly sanitized. He tells an interesting tale of woeful Soviet technology: a Russian spy is caught in a Third World country because his transmitter is so weak he has to park his van around the corner from the Soviet embassy to radio in his report. But it includes no details about where it happened, the circumstances or the consequences.

That doesn't mean Turner's book is boring — anything but. He deals candidly with several controversies, from his cutbacks of personnel to philosophical debates about covert operations. And his memoirs are readable, thanks to some help from The Washington Post's Bob Woodward.

The more reasonable explanation for the Reagan overreaction is the book's sound case for an intelligence system that's responsive to congressional oversight. Turner criticizes the administration's enthusiasm for covert operations, especially in Nicaragua, and its disdain for efforts by Congress to monitor CIA projects.

Effective congressional oversight, rather than compromising CIA operations, actually provides a broader base of support, Turner argues. He points out that the Reagan administration's own actions in Central America, such as the decision to mine Nicaraguan harbors, were undercut by an unwillingness to share this information with Congress. As a result, even such staunch administration backers as Barry Goldwater told Director William Casey he was "pissed off" by the way the episode was handled.

But Turner goes further. He singles out Casey for a speech the current director gave last year in which he claimed that, with few exceptions, the charges about CIA abuses in the mid-1970s "were false." Turner calls Casey's view "inaccurate and dangerous."

Turner should know. When Carter, his former Naval Academy classmate, named him to head the CIA, Turner reviewed many of the CIA horror stories that had emerged by 1977 — LSD experiments run amuck, assassination

plots, infiltration of American organizations, the opening of U.S. mail, spying on Americans.

These actions were wrong, unethical and, Turner emphasizes, counter-productive.

Turner guided the agency through a period when the president, the Congress and the public sought greater control over the agency, establishing new rules designed to prevent further abuses. But that raises the fear of an overreaction — how do you collect and protect necessary secrets while allowing enough supervision?

Turner deals in a common sense way with these competing demands of secrecy and democracy. He points out that once congressional committees realized that close supervision of the details of a CIA operation was unnecessary and potentially dangerous, they backed off. The two sides learned to live with each other — a relationship Turner sees jeopardized by the Reagan administration's current indifference.

In the nasty world of "dirty tricks" and espionage amorality, Turner also offers some sound advice on an ethical test for intelligence activities. Before the CIA and an administration approves an action, leaders should ask one crucial question — could they defend their decision before the public if the action became public? He's not advocating a Gallup Poll test of CIA operations, just a recognition that leaders should be prepared to take the criticism and defend the importance of their actions if word gets out.

During his four-year stint as agency director, Turner found other crying needs for improvement in the CIA: more emphasis on analysis of information rather than the glamorous branch of espionage, and greater concentration on parts of the world the United States often neglects — until a crisis occurs.

Turner concedes that the CIA focuses much of its attention on the Soviets, Europe and, to some extent, Latin America. But events in the Middle East, Iran and Africa

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often catch us by surprise. As the Beirut bombings and the TWA hostage crisis demonstrate, our intelligence is woefully inadequate about who is responsible for terrorism.

Of course, our failure to gauge the strength of Islamic fundamentalism began in Iran, and Turner tries to sidestep any responsibility for not predicting the fall of the shah. His book is notable for one glaring omission — there is no discussion of the Iranian hostage crisis and the CIA's intelligence efforts before the failed rescue mission.

In our efforts to counter and anticipate the Soviets, Turner gives U.S. intelligence higher marks.

And while some Americans argue that our nation is always at a disadvantage in the espionage game because the Soviet Union is a closed society, obsessed with security, Turner dissents. He reminds us that the essence of good intelligence is reliable, accurate information.

The evidence from Soviet defectors and other sources is that KGB agents throughout the world cannot afford accuracy. They must tailor their reports to the party line adopted by the highest leadership. Thoughtful analysis, an effort to look at several sides to a question — these intelligence requirements often fail within the Soviet system.

As long as our system divorces the objective analysis of information from the making of policy, we'll stay ahead of the game, Turner emphasizes. But when our leaders start to demand ammunition for their views rather than accurate analysis — and there is some evidence this has happened in the Reagan White House over Central America — we're in trouble.

Fortunately, that's a major point that Turner's unfriendly editors — his successors — weren't able to edit out of *Secrecy and Democracy*.

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